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WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:
~~CLAIMS~~
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1. A requirements matching broker for use in a requirements matching

5 system comprising at least one requirements matching broker accessible by
means of a communications network, said requirements matching broker having:

an input for receiving a user request message by means of said
communications network, wherein a user request message includes an identifier
for the sender of the request message and a specification of user requirements;

10 and

routing means for forwarding a received user request message to a
destination determined by said routing means and accessible by means of said
communications network, wherein said routing means comprise:

a store for storing at least one routing rule for controlling said

15 routing means, wherein a routing rule comprises a specification of supplier
deliverables and an identifier for a corresponding destination;

comparison means for comparing a specification of user
requirements contained in a received user request message with a specification of
supplier deliverables contained in a stored routing rule and, in dependence upon

20 the result of said comparison, identifying a corresponding destination for the
forwarding of said user request message; and

forwarding means for transmitting, by means of said
communications network, a received user request message to a destination
identified by said comparison means.

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2. A requirements matching broker according to Claim 1, wherein said
routing means further include registration means arranged, on receipt of a
message conveying a routing rule, to store said message routing rule in the store.

30 3. A requirements matching broker according to Claim 2, wherein said
registration means are arranged to generate a message including a message
routing rule and to transmit the generated message to another requirements
matching broker.

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4.   A requirements matching broker according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 3,~~ *claim 1* including:

information extraction means for extracting a predetermined type of information from a received user request message, prior to forwarding of the received message by the forwarding means, and to store the extracted information; and

means responsive, on receipt of a message conveying a request to supply said extracted information, to transmit to the sender of the message conveying the request a message including said extracted information.

5.   A requirements matching broker according to Claim 4, wherein said predetermined type of information is the identifier for the sender of a user request message.

6.   A requirements matching broker according to Claim 4 ~~or Claim 5,~~ including billing means for raising a charge in respect of the sender of each request to supply extracted information.

7.   A requirements matching system comprising a plurality of requirements matching brokers, each broker being interconnected with other brokers of the system by means of a communications network, wherein each broker is arranged, in use, to forward a received user request message to a predetermined network destination selected by the broker according to the type of a requirements specification conveyed by the received request message, identified by the broker from a predefined set of types, and wherein each broker of said system is arranged to receive, forwarded by other brokers of said system, user request messages conveying a different predetermined type of requirements specification from said predefined set of types.

8.   ~~A system according to Claim 7, wherein each broker of the system is a broker according to Claim 1.~~

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9.   A system according to Claim 7 ~~or Claim 8~~, including first user access means connected to said communications network to enable a user to launch into said system of brokers a message conveying a requirements specification.

claim 7

10.   A system according to ~~any one of claims 7 to 9~~, including second user access means connected to said communications network to enable a user to receive, from one or more brokers of said plurality of brokers, messages conveying a requirements specification of a predetermined type and wherein said one or more brokers is arranged to forward to said second user access means received messages conveying a requirements specification of said predetermined type.

Claim 7

11.   A system according to ~~any one of claims 7 to 10~~, wherein each said requirements specification is defined according to a predetermined representation scheme.

12.   A requirements matching system, having at least one requirements matching broker arranged with access to a communications network, wherein said at least one requirements matching broker includes:

an input for receiving a user request message by means of said communications network, wherein a user request message includes an identifier for the sender of the request message and a specification of user requirements; and

routing means for forwarding a received user request message to a destination determined by said routing means and accessible by means of said communications network, wherein said routing means comprise:

a store for storing at least one routing rule for controlling said routing means, wherein a routing rule comprises a specification of supplier deliverables and an identifier for a corresponding destination;

comparison means for comparing a specification of user requirements contained in a received user request message with a specification of supplier deliverables contained in a stored routing rule and, in dependence upon

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the result of said comparison, identifying a corresponding destination for the forwarding of said user request message; and

forwarding means for transmitting, by means of said communications network, a received user request message to a destination

5   identified by said comparison means.

13.   A requirements matching system according to Claim 12, the system including first and second access provision means each having an interface to said communication network, wherein said first access provision means include means

10   to enable a first user to transmit, over said communications network to said at least one requirements matching broker, a message including a specification of user requirements defined according to a predetermined representation scheme, and wherein said second access provision means include means to enable a second user to receive a message transmitted by a requirements matching broker,

15   including the specification of user requirements transmitted by said first user.

14.   An electronic tendering system, including at least one requirements matching broker according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 6~~. Claim V

20   15.   An electronic tendering system including a plurality of requirements matching brokers, each broker being interconnected with other brokers of the system by means of a communications network, wherein each broker is arranged, in use, to forward a received user request message to a predetermined network destination selected by the broker according to the type of a requirements

25   specification conveyed by the received request message, identified by the broker from a predefined set of types, and wherein each broker of said system is arranged to receive, forwarded by other brokers of said system, user request messages conveying a different predetermined type of requirements specification from said predefined set of types.

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16.   A method of routing a request message conveying a specification of user requirements from a user to a potential supplier, the method comprising the steps of:

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receiving a request message conveying a specification of user requirements;

comparing the specification of requirements conveyed by said received request message with a specification of supplier deliverables included in a rule for

5   routing request messages, each of said rules for routing request messages including a specification of supplier deliverables and an identifier for a corresponding forwarding destination;

in dependence upon the result of said comparison, identifying a forwarding destination corresponding with the specification of user requirements

10   conveyed by said received request message; and

transmitting a message, including said specification of user requirements to said identified forwarding destination.

17.   A method according to Claim 16, including the step of, on receipt of the

15   request message conveying the specification of user requirements, extracting one or more predetermined types of information from the request message and storing the extracted information.

18.   A method according to Claim 16 ~~or Claim 17~~, wherein each said

20   specification of user requirements and of supplier deliverables is defined according to the same predetermined representation scheme.

19.   A method of matching a buyer's requirements for goods or services with a potential supplier of said goods or services in an electronic tendering system,

25   comprising the steps of:

(i)   storing one or more routing rules, each routing rule comprising, for a given supplier, a specification of goods or services available from said supplier and an address for said supplier, each said specification being defined according to a predetermined representation scheme;

30   (ii)   defining a specification of goods or services required by said buyer using the same said predetermined representation scheme;

(iii)   comparing the buyer specification from step (ii) with a supplier specification contained in one of said one or more routing rules;

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    (iv)   identifying a supplier address in dependence upon said comparison;

    (v)   forwarding said buyer specification to the supplier address identified at step (iv).

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